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Book review

Verbeke, Saartje. ***Alignment and Ergativity in New Indo-Aryan Languages***. (Empirical Approaches to Language Typology [EALT] 51). Berlin & Boston: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008, xi + 320pp.

Indo-Aryan is a branch of the Indo-European language family spoken by roughly 400 million inhabitants of the South Asian subcontinent and their diaspora. Descended from Vedic and Classical Sanskrit (Old Indo-Aryan) and the subsequent Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrits, the earliest forms of the languages today known as New Indo-Aryan (NIA) appeared roughly between 1000 and 1300 CE. One feature that emerged in the midst of this transition, and that remains a common areal feature to this day, is split-ergativity. In this construction, S and O arguments are aligned morphologically, while A is treated distinctly in transitive perfective clauses. This is usually accomplished by case marking on the A-argument (some NIA languages have a unique marker for this function) and verbal agreement with the O. While these are the basic features associated with "typically" ergative constructions in NIA, such archetypical or "perfectly ergative" constructions are rare.

This book provides a much-needed synchronic overview of the different manifestations of morphological ergativity in NIA, and uses quantitative methods to establish the range of language specific strength of this feature. The bulk of each chapter is reserved for well known, well documented varieties, each providing a basis for analysing that respective branch of Indo-Aryan: Assamese (Eastern Indo-Aryan); Nepali (Northern Indo-Aryan); Kashmiri (Western Indo-Aryan); Rajasthani (Central Indo-Aryan).

Although this book deals primarily with Indo-Aryan, it addresses theories of alignment in general. Chapter 1 is an in-depth overview of syntactic concepts that are relevant throughout the book. This includes a review of the functional-typological literature (e.g. Comrie 1978; Dixon 1979; 1994; Plank 1979), which launched the modern debate on ergativity, alignment and argument coding and which established much of the terminology that is still in standard use on these topics. This is followed by a summary the concepts such as core arguments and grammatical relations, including a section on the question of subjects and subjecthood properties. Such concepts are particularly problematic when examining alignment in languages such as New Indo-Aryan, in which subjecthood is defined by an overlap of syntactic and semantic properties that may not be confined to a single argument in the clause. The remainder of the chapter deals with argument coding strategies, motivations for ergativity, and reviews different theories that attempt to explain this phenomenon.

Chapter 2 gives basic facts about Indo-Aryan as a language family and its syntactic features, including (Section 2.1) the distribution of speakers, the official status of individual languages, historical/genetic classifications of Indo-Aryan subgroups, and (Section 2.2) alignment and differential subject/object marking, specifically with regard to Hindi/Urdu. Here, the author reviews theories of case motivation in Hindi (e.g. Mohanan 1994a; Aissen 2003; Siewierska and Bakker 2009; Klein and de Swart 2011). The author also uses Hindi as a sample for the feature of object marking present in most NIA languages – the accusative case clitic (*-ko*) – which only appears on the O if the later is animate and/or definite, and is also the marker for IO recipients/beneficiaries. However, in ditransitive constructions where *-ko* is obligatory on the IO, the O must remain unmarked. The author chooses to label *-ko* as a specifically "objective" case marker. Here she refutes Mohanan (1994a) who cites the restrictions on double-object marking as evidence that *-ko* carries an overlap of case features (accusative and dative), rather than corresponding to a single grammatical case. However, she makes no mention of Mohanan (1994b), in which the apparent unacceptability of double-marked object constructions are explained as a language specific modification of the Obligatory Contour Pinciple (see Leben 1973; Goldsmith 1976, cf. Mohanan 1994b). Here, Mohanan shows that this disprefered sequence of adjacent case marking is not particular to *-ko* but also other non-nominative cases (1994b: 188–189).

Section 2.3 provides a brief history of the evolutionary stages of Indo-Aryan, and reviews different theories on the origin of the ergative construction: passive reanalysis (e.g. Anderson 1976; Dik 1978; Bubenik 1998), and active perfect participle (e.g. Klaiman 1978; Hock 1986; Peterson 1998). Section 2.4 covers some salient features of New Indo-Aryan: the multilayered system of case morphology (Masica 1991), and various verbal forms, e.g. participles, light verbs and complex predicates, passives, causative, experiencer constructions, and unergatives.

The remaining four core chapters of the book (3–6) focus on geographical regions of Indo-Aryan by describing one language in detail and comparing it with other related varieties.

Chapter 3 examines Eastern IA with a focus on "Asamiya" (i.e. Assamese). Here it is shown that Assamese has a case marking system which is, in many ways, divergent from that commonly associated with western varieties; there is no direct/oblique distinction, and some of the case functions that in most NIA languages are marked by postpositioned clitics appear to be inflected as suffixes on the noun stem. Also, while Assamese has a marker (*-k*) for both O and IO, it has a second marker (*-ɬai*) specificially for IO-arguments that occurs specifically in the semantic role of beneficiary. Several features that are common to eastern varieties of NIA are also discussed here: experiencer subjects can be marked using

the genitive form, as well as the dative (as is more common in western varieties); the copula shows person agreement, and is no longer independent but merged onto the stem of the lexical verb. Section 3.2 compares the transitive verb paradigms of Assamese with other eastern varieties. This is particularly interesting in Eastern Indo-Aryan as many of these languages have distinct conjugative paradigms for transitive/intransitive. There is also the distinct areal feature of person agreement on the main verb. Assamese has no grammatical gender or number, and therefore the only feature that gets cross-referenced on the verb is that of person. Other topics discussed in this section are person agreement, honorific suffixes in Maithili and Magahi, and the effect of honorificity on verb agreement. Section 3.3 is a description of ergative marking in Eastern Indo-Aryan, which is brief since Assamese is the only definite member of this branch that marks A-arguments. A-arguments are marked on all transitive nouns regardless of the aspect of the verb.

Chapter 4 is on Nepali, however it also makes some interesting comparative observations. Nepali, like Assamese, marks A-arguments ergative in both perfective and imperfective clauses and yet has an entirely accusative verb-NP agreement pattern (the verb always agrees with A). The author observes that these two languages both have had sustained historical contact with the Tibeto-Burman language family. Following the work of Genetti (2007), Verbeke speculates that this "extention" of ergative marking to imperfective clauses may be due to frequent bilingualism of speakers of Nepali and the Tibeto-Burman Newar language. The latter, like most Tibetan varieties, has an ergative marking pattern that is independent of aspect, and verbs agree in person with all ergative subjects inspite of marking. A third example of ergative marking extention to imperfective verbs in NIA is in Shina (a subgroup of "Dardic"). Here, not only is the marking and agreement pattern similar to Tibetan, but two separate forms are used: *-e/-i* for perfective agents, and *-s(a)* for imperfective agents. Verbeke points out that while the former resembles the traditional Indo-Aryan oblique form, the latter seems more likely to derive from Tibetan (e.g. Bailey 1924; Hook and Koul 2004).

Chapter 5 deals with Western Indo-Aryan, and in particular the georgraphically and typologically marginal Northwestern group. Here Kashmiri, Shina, Pashai etc. have been classified under the label "Dardic", refering to the northwestern branch of Indo-Aryan, and which comprises a group of geographically isolated languages in the Hindu Kush, Swat and Indus Kohistan, Karakoram, and Western Himalayan mountains (Morgenstierne 1961; Bashir 2003: 822). Dardic is more a term of convenience, than a descriptive term, as this "family" can be divided into several geneological sublineages. The Dardic languages appear at first glance more divergent and less recognisably Indo-Aryan. Their relative geographic isolation may explain why they appear not to have undergone the

phonological and morpho-syntactic changes that occurred during the Middle Indo-Aryan period (Bashir 2003: 822). The Dardic languages have also been influenced by neighbouring Tibetan and Iranian languages. This chapter gives a thorough account of head and dependent marking in Kashmiri, which involves a highly complex system of pronominal verbal suffixes. Differential argument marking in Kashmiri follows a type of person-based split that is unique in NIA. In most NIA languages O marking is determinered by the person ranking of the O and generally corresponds to the Referential Hiearachy (RH) as defined by Silverstein (1976) and Comrie (1981). Normally this occurs in spite of other arguments in the clause. In Kashmiri, however, O marking is determined relative to A. If the O is higher than – or the same as – A on the RH (e.g. if O is first person and A is second or third person), then the O will take objective case.

The remainder of the chapter contains a critical review of literature on the topic of Kashmiri pronominal suffixes (e.g. Hook and Koul 1984; Wali and Koul 1994), and a description of similar phenomena in Poguli, Sindhi, and Siraiki. The author also draws comparisons between Marathi and Kashmiri, as both give preference to cross-referencing second person on the verb.

Chapter 6 focuses on differential subject/object marking in Marwari, Harauti, Gujarati, Panjabi, Marathi and nonstandard varieties of Hindi. This "Central Group" is one that has long been overshadowed by Hindi, however, the micro-variation in alignment, even within the Hindi-belt (e.g. Hindi dialects of Braj, Bundeli and Awadhi), is significant (a topic addressed in Section 6.3). Section 6.1 describes case marking and verb agreement in Marwari – the most culturally dominant dialect and de facto standard of Rajasthani. Section 6.2.1 reviews the historical background that led to the erosion of A marking in Marwari (e.g. Khokhlova 1992; Magier 1983), which today appears only optionally as the oblique third person plural pronoun. Here ergative marking appears to pattern against Silverstein's (1976) RH. In simplified terms, the RH states that nominals, inherently ranking lower in terms of person and animacy, are more likely to take ergative marking than pronouns. Pronouns are inherently higher in animacy and definitness than nominals and are therefore more natural agents and hence less likely to be marked as such. Therefore, if a language has A marking for only one type of NP, it will be nominals. It follows then that if a language marks pronouns ergative, then nominals will also be marked ergative. Reverse NP-splits as found in Marwari and other Rajasthani dialects, where A marking may be limited to the pronouns, may be due to the diachronic breakdown of ergativity (Phillips 2013). Filiminova (2005**:** 98) argues that pronouns are frequently more resistant to change than nominals, since they are often deictic words that trace back to more archaic lexical sources. Though Marwari has all but lost ergative marking, the agreement system is still strongly ergative; the verb agrees with the O, even

when the later is marked accusative. In NIA, agreement with accusative marked direct objects is mostly limited to Rajasthani and Gujarati.

Section 6.2.2 presents Harauti as a problematic example of differential marking. Harauti is a Rajasthani dialect that marks ergativity with a *-naĩ* form, clearly related to the Hindi ergative marker *-ne*. *-ne* (or some variation thereofH) is also the general object marker in Rajasthani, and there has been much plausible speculation that the two may share a common origin (see Tessitori 1913; Butt 2001: 116, 2006: 83; Butt and Ahmed 2011; Montaut 2004, 2006, 2009). The result is that Harauti has a single, multifunctional case form that marks ergative A, O, and IO-arguments, as well as experiencer subjects. Verbeke argues that the factors determining the occurrence of *-ne* are primarily semantic (i.e. animacy and definiteness) and secondarily to distinguish the core arguments in the clause. The latter function is potentially problematic, as under certain conditions, the same marker would be required to appear on both A and O arguments simultaneously, thereby making its discriminatory function redundant. The author shows, however, that Harauti resists such constructions by allowing *-naĩ* to occur only once in a minimal clause. Therefore, if A is marked ergative by *-naĩ*, and the O is animate and definite, the latter will be marked instead by an oblique locative form. Harauti, therefore, appears to utilise alternative markers in its inventory so as to avoid the ambiguity of core arguments. This phenomenon of homophonous (or "multifunctional") A/O marking deserves further attention, as it provides a potential ground for testing the basic functions of case (i.e. discriminatory vs. indexing), and how individual languages tolerate structurally redundant case marking. Such A/O homophony has been attested in other nonstandard Central Indo-Aryan varieties, such as in Eastern Rajasthani dialects Bangru (Singh 1970), Haryanvi (Shirani 1987, cf. Butt 2007: 18), and Ahirwati (Yadav n.d.: 208, cf. Stronski 2010), as well as in Bhili (Phillips 2012) and Khandasi dialects of southeastern Rajasthan and Maharashtra state (Grierson 1968 [1906–1928]: Vol. 9:III, 38).

Verbeke concludes, based on an inventory of 200 sentences taken from 20 languages, that the ergative construction is less prevalent in NIA than is often assumed. It is also more stable (i.e. not simply a historical accident that is in the process of dying out), since languages utilise mechanisms of case marking and verbal agreement to "economically" disambiguate A from O arguments. She also argues – contrary to the traditional Indo-Aryanist assumption – that ergative case (i.e. marking) and ergative agreement function independently of one-another. For example, she points out that while both features may be used to distinguish core arguments, ergative case is structural, and therefore independent of indexing. The motivations for ergative agreement seem to be primarily historical; O-agreement developed in late Middle Indo-Aryan when the participle construction

became finite, while ergative case forms emerged much later after the total erosion of the inflectional case system.

Verbeke's choice of nomenclature was at times inconsistent with her intent to refer to the languages as they are known by the speech-communities, as opposed to their Anglicised names. Hence, the languages otherwise known in English has "Assamese" and "Bengali" are refered to as "Asamiya" and "Bangla" respsectively. The former is however a curious choice as "Assamese" is the locally accepted and long established name in English for the language pronounced in local speech as *ɔxɔmiya*. It is therefore not clear why it is preferable to use a name that the speakers themselves would never use either in English or in their own language. Another example which is potentially problematic is the use of Newari to refer to the Tibeto-Burman language of the Kathmandu valley. This is a sensitive issue for speakers of this language, who prefer the name "Newar" or "Nepal Bhasha" which have been well established since several decades to refer to the language in English, despite the fact that (or precisely because) the Nepali term has remain Newari.

Works such as Masica (1991) and Cardona and Jain (2003) have provided general reference grammars for the Indo-Aryan language family, while others have dealt with split-ergativity and alignment in specific NIA languages or subgroups. To the best of the reviewer's knowledge *Alignment and Ergativity in New Indo-Aryan Languages* is to date the most comprehensive study of split-ergativity in NIA and exceeds any work in examining its typological scope. This work will prove an invaluable resource to typologists interested in ergativity, as well as a reference for specialists of Indo-Aryan, working on languages specific features. However, the decision to divide main chapters according to language groups (based on geography or theorical language subfamilies) may be problematic, as many of the features discussed cannot be confined to regions. An alternative approach may have been to divide chapters based on phenomena, and examine features in particular languages in the subsections. For example, while the general concept of Differential Object Marking is dealt with in the introduction, it is only discussed in detail in Central Indo-Aryan. Many other sections scratch the surface of phenomena that deserve indepth empirical study. One such phenomenon is that of case syncretism, particularly of A and O markers. An example of this was given in Harauti, but many such examples are attested in nonstandard Hindi varieties, and eastern Rajasthani. As the author acknowledges, the scope of alignment patterns is almost certainly much broader than that which is captured in this study, and she rightly emphasises the need for data collection on microvariation.

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